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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found
here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE INTEGRITY OF EZEKIEL 40-48

by CAMERON MACKAY

THE last nine chapters of Ezekiel, which in some ways constitute the greatest problem of the whole book, have received special attention from Mr. Mackay for many years. His earlier contributions to various aspects of this problem have appeared in the "Princeton Theological Review" (1922, 1923, 1924), the "Church Quarterly Review" (1935) and the "Expository Times" (1944). Here he considers, in the light of recent criticism, the integrity of this section of Ezekiel both in itself and with the rest of the book.

THE fog which has long shrouded Ezekiel's last vision, arising from controversy on whether it be memorandum of previous praxis, or ideal programme outmoded by events, or prediction yet to be fulfilled, or complex symbol of the Gospel dispensation, or amalgam in some degree of those intents, is thickened now by debate on how far, if at all, it is attributable to a prophet whose credentials as Exilic visionary are in question. From the confidence of the Fathers who saw the Ezekielian chariot borne by the four Gospels, still breathing last century in consensus that at its climactic return "through the veil of legal institutions the prophet saw the day of Christ,"¹ exposition has retreated, if not to Talmudic waiting for Elijah,² at least to fellowship with the lament:

What are the Natures of those Living Creatures the Heav'nly Father only Knoweth. No Individual knoweth, nor can know in all Eternity.³

In such imbroglio it should be useful to consider how far the mind, if not the hand, of the author of chs. 1-39 is discernible in 40-48. Against extreme views denying the latter section to Ezekiel⁴ there is long-standing agreement that it is the Book's climax, "a singularly appropriate and impressive one," "his last legacy to his people, conceived in the maturity of his power," that, as in the Jewish ban, *principia et finis* go together — "not only does the

¹ Skinner, *Expositor's Bible* (1895), 423.

² Fisch, *Ezekiel* (Jewish commentary, 1950), xi, 265, 270, 316: cp. references to Rashi and "Kimchi, on the other hand."

³ Blake, pencilled addition to *Vala, or The Four Zoas*, i. (Cp. Josephus, *Antiq.* viii, 3, 3, of temple cherubim, "Nobody can tell or conceive what they were like.")

⁴ Hölscher (1924); Herntrich (1932); Irwin (1944).

end fit in with the beginning; the beginning fits in with the end.”⁵ Recent summings are that “it is doubtful if chs. 40-48 should be transferred bodily to another,” there being “presupposition in favour of the originality of the throne-chariot concept in Ezekiel, which would include by inference also its appearance in chs. 40-48.”⁶ Such analysis accredits at least 40:1-43:12 (temple-plan and chariot’s return) and 46:19-47:12 (Guide’s visits to kitchens and sanctuary stream), the provenance of the rest (legislation and land-plan) being variously found.

Veridical vision and conscious art alike require sequel to the chariot’s rainbow (1:28). Its purport as war-bow laid aside, signal of kindliness after storm, is not dependent on relation to the Noachic “everlasting covenant” of Gen. 9:8-17 (assigned to P), “my covenant of peace” in Is. 54. Whether at the chariot’s leave-taking the expression of the Ezekielian everlasting covenant of peace be out of place or not (11:17-21), “they shall be my people, and I will be their God” is conveyed in the State car’s flag of peace, and implemented not only in return to “dwell in the midst of them for ever” (43:7 ff.) but circumstantially in the queried code which ignores the commonalty’s moral offences and legislates for “a people saved and led by the spirit,”⁷ the law written in their hearts so that they “keep my judgments, and do them” (11:20; 36:27).

Whatever the covenant significance of the rainbow — and such was surely known to Ezekiel — it has been recognized that “the chariot has taken the place of the ark”⁸ of the covenant. This appears in Ezekiel’s realization amid Moriah’s familiar courts that “the fiery four-faced creatures burning” were “none other than the Cherubim of the inner sanctuary,”⁹ and conversely in the recognition in I Chron. 28:18 of the “chariot” in the shrine of him “that sitteth upon the cherubim.” Beside the Chebar the

⁵ Cooke, *Internat. Critical Comm.* (1936), 425 f.; M’Fadyen, *Peake’s Comm.* (1920), 517 f.; Jerome, *Ad Paulinum*; Lofthouse, *Prophet of Reconstruction* (1920), 216.

⁶ Rowley, *Growth of OT* (1950), 106; May, *Interpreter’s Bible* (1956), VI, 47; cp. Allen, 283.

⁷ Davidson, *Cambridge Bible*, 315 f., 374; cp. Skinner, 393 f., 481 ff., “legislating for the millennium”.

⁸ Lofthouse, *Century Bible*, 58; cp. Currey, *Holy Bible with Comm.* (ed. F. C. Cook, 1876), VI, 185, “The living cherubim, the firmament, and the rainbow of mercy, replace the cherubic figures and the golden chest (Kliefoth).” In 9:3 it is a question whether “cherub” indicates ark (Lofthouse, Fisch) or chariot (Davidson, Cooke).

⁹ Masefield, *The Everlasting Mercy*; Cooke, 114. See 10:20 with *Cent. B.* note.

cherubim-chariot as meeting-place with priest replaces ark in Jerusalem; and in 11:22 f. its spectacular abandonment of the temple corresponds to the ark's disappearance from history, so that its rest on Olivet signals, "Say no more, The ark of the covenant" (Jer. 3:16), "his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives" (Zech. 14:4). In the final vision the transmutation of the "footstool" is in effect: the holy of holies has no furniture; the proclamation of "the place of the soles of my feet" (43:7) ignores ark; and absence of the historical focus of worship, so discomposing to post-Exilic praxis that it had to be replaced by "foundation-stone" as depository for blood, is unnoticed in a ritual where is no word of bringing blood into the sanctuary. Again the legislation is at one with the overall new-covenant concept.

Of the living creature it can at least be said with Blake: "They are named Life's,"¹⁰ and so link with the wardens of the tree of life in Gen. 3:24 (assigned to J), while our Book's allusion to the King of Tyre as "covering cherub" in Eden suggests "that the cherub of paradise has been assimilated to the cherubim of the ark."¹¹ In the temple-vision such assimilation is consummated in a merging of Eden, ark, and chariot in the carvings of palm tree between cherubim (41:18 ff.), vignette of creation at destination. The faces visible in two-dimensional portrayal—man and lion—belong to the throne-bearers, but the arrangement, a cherub gazing on the tree from either side, recalls the twin cherubim of the oracle, while the palm, botany's *phœnix*, international symbol of new life, and now sole emblem of a temple for all nations,¹² is set between the cherubim as tree of life replacing the mercy-seat, from whose mystic blood, as it were, it springs.

The association of cherub with wind, suggesting from the time of the Fathers that the four *zoa* represent the four winds which stand before the Lord of all earth, likewise points to them as ministers of life, since from the four winds comes to Israel's bones the breath of life which is "my spirit,"¹³ the selfsame *flatus spiritus sancti* of the chariot-bearers where "one Spirit in them ruled."¹⁴ Their arrangement round the throne so that with outstretched wings they form a square again suggests the four quarters whence come

¹⁰ *Vala*, ix: Heb. *hayyoth*; Gk. ζῷα.

¹¹ Cooke, 318, on 38:11 ff.

¹² 40:16, etc.; 47:22 f; cp. 17:23. See "The Sign of the Palm Tree," *Church Quarterly Review*, July-September, 1938, 187 ff.

¹³ Ch. 37:9, 14; 2 Sam. 22:11 = Ps. 18:10; Ps. 104:4 = Heb. 1:7; Zech. 6:5. Cp. Irenaeus, iii, 11, 8; Charles, *Revelation*, I, 122 f. "Wind", "breath", "spirit" all render the same word *ruach*.

¹⁴ Ch. 1: 20 f.; 10: 17; Jerome, *loc. cit.*; Milton, *Paradise Lost*, vi, 848.

the four winds;¹⁵ and this foursquare projection of cosmic spirit, the life of the world, is recognized as underlying the description of "the chariot and all belonging to it," including the temple,¹⁶ where the relationship is driven home in terming each side of the sanctuary square a "wind," and in applying to the queried altar the purely Ezekielian expression for the "four sides" of the chariot-bearers.¹⁷ Finally the squareness of oblation-land is emphasized, and the city's outline repeated as envoy, so that this "supplement" is linchpin of the chariot's connection with the New Jerusalem where "the city lieth foursquare" (Rev. 21:16).

If in the oblation-square "the Four Living Creatures, Chariots of Humanity Divine Incomprehensible"¹⁸ reach destination rather than testing-station, what of the Charioteer? Authorities agree in identifying him with the stern Guide to Moriah's judgment, but only the older school see him again in the new temple's cicerone. The first Guide is by consensus a manifestation of Jehovah in human form—yet to say he is Jehovah offends both the reticence of the Chebar vision and the fundamental principle of Judaism upheld in the New Testament verdict that no man of any time has seen God.¹⁹ When he is styled "Jehovah," "Lord God," and speaks of "my sanctuary" (ch. 9), he is presented on the same lines as "the angel of the Lord" or angel of the covenant who in earlier books both speaks and is spoken of as God; and the milder aspect of 40:3, radiance as of Transfiguration and the feet of life²⁰ as against consuming fire, could indicate not inferior rank but pacific mission. In 44:2, 5 the Guide is still called "Jehovah," and in 43:6 ff. there is "ambiguity as to the speaker (Yahweh, or the man?)"; Davidson notes: "The voice immediately takes the shape of a man," and G. A. Smith that it "becomes one with the *Man* standing at his side. Ezekiel's Angel-interpreter is simply one function of the Word of God"²¹—comments which coalesce with the first theophany's most definite statements on the Charioteer,

¹⁵ Jer. 49:36; Rev. 7:1.

¹⁶ Streane, *Camb. B.*, 7; cp. *Cent. B.*, 56. Inner court, 40:47; holy of holies, 41:4; door-posts, 41:21; altar, 43:16; enclosing wall, 42:15-20, 45:2; oblation-land, 48:20; city, 48:16, 30-34.

¹⁷ Ch. 42: 16-20, RVm.; 1:8, 17; 10:11; 43:16 f., RV: see *Oxford Lexicon*, 917 b.

¹⁸ Blake, *Jerusalem*, iv, 98.

¹⁹ Cp. Maimonides in Fisch, xii, 8; Talmud and NT in Cooke, 5.

²⁰ LXX στιλβωτός, "shining", in NT only in Mark 9:3. For feet of brass see 1:7, Rev. 1:15.

²¹ Loftouse, *Cent. B.*, 63; Davidson, 354; Smith, *Book of Twelve Prophets*, II, 313.

"The word of Jehovah came expressly . . . and I heard a voice of one that spake" (1 : 3, 28).

The oracle of Malachi 3, recalling the purifying of the Levites in Ezek. 44, terms the pioneer of offerings in righteousness (order of Zadok) "the 'Adon whom ye seek . . . even the angel of the covenant." This, the sole occurrence of the title generally allowed *the Angel* who consistently manifests Jehovah,²² upholds the re-appearance of the covenant-avenger of Moriah as agent no longer of the ministration of death but of the spirit in hearts of flesh (cp. 2 Cor. 3), a rôle implicit when "the Spirit of the Highest came"²³ in rainbowed covenant-car, "for if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." As the majority view grants authenticity to the Guide-passages, the insistent question is whether the Charioteer's mission is complete in temple-plan without ritual. Could the angel, actual or imagined, concentrate on cubits and leave to a subsequent source directions better fitted to convey his covenant-message?

The ritual need not be intermediary between past and Priestly Code—especially if dated c. 400 B.C.²⁴ and so as rival effort to P's. That in any case it makes no show of preserving historical praxis is a finding of which the vanished ark is merely one buttress: the paschal meal has gone (45 : 21 ff.); the altar, as of hewn stone and approached by steps (43 : 13 ff.), is defiantly non-traditional; a high priest is not in evidence. Such changes have patent relation to the covenant of peace wherein the Christ is Lamb and passover, mercy-seat and high priest,²⁵ and concur with the reputation previously earned of "Gospel-prophet" and Pauline thinker who "of all Old Testament writers, binds the old dispensation most closely to the new."²⁶

The ritual revolution advertised in the heterodox altar recalls the unprecedented pronouncement of 20: 40 f., "I will seek your offerings. . . . As a sweet savour will I accept you," recognized as

²² Judg. 2: 1 with Exod. 23: 20 f., Acts 7: 38. This angel was equated by earliest Fathers to the Second Person of the Trinity, and so still *New Bible Comm.* (I.V.F., 1953). "This idea was just . . . but it was to go beyond the OT" (Davidson, *Hastings DB*, s.v. "Angel", cited by Driver, *Genesis*, 184).

²³ Whittier, *Religious Poems*, "Ezekiel".

²⁴ So Rowley, 107; Cooke, xxvi, 426.

²⁵ John 1:36; I Cor. 5:7; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 3:1; 13:10. See "The Key of OT," *Church Quarterly Review*, January, 1935, 173 ff.

²⁶ Currey, 4, 80, 150; Davidson, *Camb. B.*, iv, 289 (Paul's "line of thought entirely coincides"); Lofthouse, *Cent. B.*, 4.

containing the germ of the temple-vision,²⁷ and echoed after the altar's consecration, "and I will accept you" (43: 18-27, incidentally the one major section denied originality with show of agreement). This full acceptance is shown in the treatment of priestly offences, for which in the priestly legislation the "blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin" and the carcase burned (Lev. 4); in the new temple there is neither high priest nor depository for blood in the sanctuary—no veil, incense-altar, or mercy-seat, the nearest approach being the temple's outer door-post (45 : 19)—and, once the temple is consecrated, the rubric for a priestly offence implies that the Lord God is now Himself the propitiation and permits "these" (emphatic) to eat all offerings (44: 28 f.), a licence corresponding to that in Heb. 13: 10 f., "We have an altar, etc." Such acceptance tallies also with the famous promise of sprinkling with clean water, understood by Dead Sea Scrolls and New Testament as cleansing by the spirit,²⁸ and, as displayed consistently throughout temple-plan and ritual, argues the latter one with, and indispensable to, plan and Book.

The absence of high priest, an official whose hereditary status persisted over the Exile, is relational to the demotion of mitre and crown "until he come whose right it is" (21: 26 f.), evidently the Davidic covenant-king (37: 24 ff.). The prince of chapters 45 f., or rather his peccable dynasty, "holds a less exalted place", and "has no priestly rights", even being banned from inner court.²⁹ On the other hand the high priest's role seems given to the prophet when addressed in second person singular as if "head of the priesthood."³⁰ This swerving from plural to "thou" is taken to show a variant hand, but can be readily related to the title "son of man", understood as denoting mankind's representative before God, and so, *a fortiori* since Ezekiel was Zadokite (1: 3) and could enter the holy place (41: 1-3), representative priest. Like Moses he is addressed from the seat on the cherubim (Num. 7: 89); his primary task of bearing in his body the sins of Israel (4: 4) suggests national priest (Num. 18: 1) with day-for-year victim (Lev. 16: 21 f.); and hierarchic rank is ascribed in his wife's personifying the

²⁷ Skinner, 188 ("important to notice"); Currey, 87.

²⁸ "Like waters of purification he will sprinkle upon him the spirit of truth."—*Manual of Discipline*, indicating Ezek. 36: 25 (Bruce, *Second Thoughts on Dead Sea Scrolls*, 102, 134); cf. Mark 1: 8, 10; Heb. 10: 22.

²⁹ Cooke, 403, 478, 497. See Ezek. 45: 9; 46: 2, 18.

³⁰ Cooke, 511. Of altar's consecration, 43: 19-25; sanctuary portion, 45: 3; cleansing of sanctuary, 45: 18-20; morning sacrifice, 46: 13 f. "Ezekiel, being a priest, is to officiate in the restored Temple at the consecration service as High Priest" (Fisch, 299).

temple, while he, like high priest in Holiness Code (Lev. 21:10 f.), is forbidden to mourn her death (24:15 ff.). Thus his treatment as *sagan* in ritual affairs continues, and calls attention to, previous presentation of the titular "son of man" as deputy of him "whose right it is" to wear the mitre.

There remains the land-plan in two passages (45:1-8; 47:13-48:35) of disputed priority, though elaboration suggests that *finis coronat opus*. No *a priori* reason appears why this should not emerge from the same process of meditation, illumination, and composition as the temple-plan; and failure to hail grand finale derives from preconception on temple-site, with consequent reading of cubits for reeds and transposition of sanctuary portion to adjoin city. Here the plan's authenticity will be considered on basis of reeds and northern sanctuary portion.³¹

The feature of both sections, the great square of oblation-land, answers to the Davidic tabernacle of 37:27, the division into most holy portion for Zadokites, holy portion, and city reflecting the disposition of David's reign when the tabernacle in Zadok's charge stood six miles north from ark on Zion.³² The same chapter's "one stick" is realized in a fusion of tribes where affinity is decided by lot, and numerical equality imputed,³³ while the tribal grouping, Judah to north, Benjamin to south, guards against "two kingdoms any more at all." The land's north boundary excludes, in contrast to Mosaic delineation,³⁴ "the land of the Gebalites" and Baalbek-Heliopolis, respective homes of Adonis- and sun-worship, a rejection corresponding to the abhorrence of ch. 8 at "the image of jealousy" seated in the north and ensuing rites of Tammuz-Adonis and sun. In the south the measurement of 25,000 reeds, or c. 50 miles, as inland extent of a tribal portion, excludes the southern shallow bay of the Dead Sea, in consonance with the Guide's statement that its marshes will be unaffected by the healing stream (47:11), while the northern end falls within the oblation-

³¹ See "Prolegomena to Ezek. 40-48," *Expository Times*, August, 1944, 292 ff.: so Jewish exegete Rashi (A.D. 1040-1105). American-Jewish translation in Fisch understands "reeds", as EVV.

³² I Kings 3:4; I Chron. 16:37 ff; 21:29; II Chron. 1:3 ff; cp. Is. 16:5; Amos 9:11 = Acts 15:16.

³³ "By lot" (45:1; 47:22; 48:29) cannot refer to the named and equal portions (47:14; contrast Num. 26:54), whose bounds are ascertainable by measurement.

³⁴ Josh. 13:4 f. See "The North Boundary of Palestine," *Journal of Theological Studies*, January, 1934, 22 ff and map.

square, agreeably with the gift of Sodom to Jerusalem under the covenant of forgiveness.³⁵

This first use of the word "covenant" focuses on the breaking forth of Jerusalem on right hand and left to take in Sodom and Samaria, ambition realized in the 50-mile square stretching from south of Bethlehem to north of Shechem. Its extension over the greater part of the Central Range conforms to Ezekiel's "extraordinary passion" for "Ye mountains of Israel," to usurp which was blasphemy,³⁶ "mountain" or "mountains" of the height of Israel (20: 40; 34: 14) being equivalent terms for the sacrosanct hill-country dedicated as heart of a world kingdom (17: 23), "the holy mountain of God" whereof Phoenicia was the winged sentry (28: 14). In this light the accredited pronouncement of 43: 12, "On the head of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy," anticipates 48: 9-12 where the most holy bounds include some 20 miles of the northern highlands.

If 43: 12 refers to an individual peak the direction jars with 40: 2 where the temple is south of such peak. On the other hand the wider sense, "the head of the mountains" as in Is. 2: 2 = Mic. 4: 1 (cf. "all my holy mountain", Is. 11: 9; 65: 25), harmonizes both with the promise of Samaria to Jerusalem under the everlasting covenant and with a land-plan of which the temple is by consensus centre, and so not at Jerusalem but at Ebal-Gerizim, primordial "navel" of the land (Judg. 9: 37), culminating prominence of Central Range, and at the same distance from Zion as new temple from its city. Ezekiel's stance was thus Ebal, the "very high mountain" of destiny looming over Moriah in ch. 8 where the first rites displayed by offended Jehovah, secret idolatry, were those of Ebal's first anathema (Deut. 27: 15); and the temple was visioned in the Vale of Shechem, home of the covenant: there its first announcement in the land was made, Abraham's victorious race was twice placed under its bond, and the Baal of the Covenant was worshipped round Joshua's witness-stone.³⁷ Thus the covenant-car, "pacified toward" Jerusalem-cum-Samaria (16: 63), alights,

³⁵ Ch. 16: 8, 46, 60 ff. Ezekiel's circle evidently favoured the northern site for Sodom: cf. Merrill, *East of Jordan*, 234 f: "The salt marsh at the southern end . . . belongs to a water system entirely distinct from that at the northern end. . . . There has always been a mountain of rock-salt at the south end of the Dead Sea, and there must always have been salt fields and marshes near it . . . never . . . a desirable location for towns."

³⁶ Lofthouse, *Cent. B.*, on 35: 12; 36: 1-7.

³⁷ Gen. 12: 7; cf. 15: 18; 35: 4; Josh. 8: 30 ff.; 24: 26 f.; Judg. 8: 33; 9: 46. Lods, *Israel*, 121 notes "the great number of 'covenant' episodes assigned to Shechem".

according to the "supplement", on its home-ground, there to reprobate, according to 44:6-8 (ascribed to Ezekiel by Herrmann, Betholet, and Cooke), alien keepers who "have broken my covenant"—sole use of that word by Charioteer. If this refers to Moriah Jehovah seizes the apocalyptic moment to take up a point omitted in previous press of abominations, the employment of foreigners as temple menials—a Davidic practice continued by Ezra and Nehemiah—and inflates it by speaking of "keepers of my charge" and finishing touch to apostasy. Alternatively, the establishment in Shechem of the Samaritans, self-styled "Keepers" with syncretic worship deplored in II Kings 17 as covenant-breach, explains the thunder of returning Glory and sets the Charioteer's seal on land-plan.

Finally there is the city Jehovah-shammah, outlined and left blank. The ark of the presence has gone, but the mystery of the Presence in David's city, Zion-cum-Bethlehem, remains. Is this, as in Ps. 110:2, the seat of the absentee high priest? The reticence of the close fits the sealed lips (3:26) which never say "Zion," key-word of other prophecy and inevitable throne of the heir of crown and mitre. This surely deliberate abstention throughout the Book joins with the muteness of "additions" on ark and high priest to suggest in ch. 48 space fenced against that "opening of the mouth" promised in the Book's last word:

Thy audience, worlds! — all things to be

The witness of the Truth in thee!³⁸

The last word on "the full majestic music of a Prophet's voice, speaking to all the ages"³⁹ may well be with poet rather than critic—scarcely with the verdict that original sections in chs. 40-48 "can readily be distinguished," qualified by such hesitations as "we may suppose," "probably," "may well have been included,"⁴⁰ and contradicted by confrères right and left. The confusion of opinion indicates that once more "criticism is attempting a task of which it is fundamentally incapable,"⁴¹ while the Book's interwoven strands of rainbow, covenant-car, ministry of life, covenant of peace, messenger of covenant, "son of man," mountains of Israel, and foursquare Davidic foundation, bound together in nodus of better ritual for the place of the covenant—identifiable as Salem,⁴² which

³⁸ Ezek. 29:21, dated 18 months after 40:1. Whittier, *loc. cit.*

³⁹ Barbara Miller, *Ezekiel and Other Poems*.

⁴⁰ Cooke, 426, 476, 487, 530.

⁴¹ W. Robertson Nicoll, in biography by Darlow, 359 f, contrasting NT critics' pretensions with proved failures of English literary criticism.

⁴² *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, July-October, 1948, 121 ff.

is Peace—argue the proper study of chs. 40-48 as of the mastermind, one not content with generalities, whether on Tyrian trade (ch. 27) or the ecology of Sheol (32 : 17 ff.), deploying its resources to build up depiction of new-covenant Israel, for the most part “very dry,” yet at the driest instinct with the “one Spirit” which descended on the prophet from

The King of Glorie in his powerful Word
And Spirit coming to create new Worlds.⁴³

Glasgow.

⁴³ Milton, *loc. cit.*, vii, 208 f.